

# THE YUKON TRAIL

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An Alaskan Love Story

By William Macleod Raine

The frozen north is an inexhaustible mine of stories, on which poet and novelist may draw to their heart's content. William Macleod Raine knows his Alaska well; but he has peopled it, not with prospectors, good seekers and squaw men, though all these play their part, but with city-bred men and women self-exiled to the wilderness, as they throw themselves heartily into the contest for which the qualification is energy, and the stake the future of Alaska.

## CHAPTER I.

—1—  
Going "in."

The midnight sun had set, but in a crotch between two snow peaks it had kindled a vast caldron from which rose a mist of jewels, garnet and turquoise, topaz and amethyst and opal, all swimming in a sea of molten gold. The glow of it still clung to the face of the broad Yukon, as a flush does to the soft, wrinkled cheek of a girl just roused from deep sleep.

Except for a faint murkiness in the air it was still day. There was light enough for the four men playing pin-ochle on the upper deck, though the women of their party, gossiping in chairs grouped near at hand, had at last put aside their embroidery. The girl who sat by herself at a little distance held a magazine still open in her lap.

Gordon Elliot had taken the boat at Pierre's Portage, fifty miles farther down the river. He had come direct from the creeks, and his impressions of the motley pioneer life at the gold diggings were so vivid that he had found an isolated corner of the deck where he could scribble them in a notebook while still fresh.

But he had not been too busy to see that the girl in the wicker chair was as much of an outsider as he was. Plainly this was her first trip in. Gordon was a stranger in the Yukon country, one not likely to be overwelcome when it became known what his mission was.

From where he was leaning against the deckhouse Elliot could see only a fine, chiseled profile shading into a mass of crisp, black hair, but some quality in the detachment of her personality stimulated gently his imagination. He wondered who she could be.

A short, thickest man who had ridden down on the stage with Elliot to Pierre's Portage drifted along the deck toward him. He wore the careless garb of a mining man in a country which looks first to comfort.

"Bound for Kuslak?" he asked, by way of opening conversation.

"Yes," answered Gordon.

The miner nodded toward the group under the awning. "That bunch lives at Kuslak. They've got on at different places the last two or three days—except Selfridge and his wife; they've been out. Guess you can tell that from hearing her talk—the little woman in the spring-blue-gray eyes that bore right through you."

"How old?"

"Search me. You never think of age when you're looking at him. Forty-five, maybe—or fifty—I don't know."

"Married?"

"No-o." Hanford Strong nodded in the direction of the Kuslak circle. "They say he's going to marry Mrs. Mallory. She's the one with the red hair."

It struck young Elliot that the miner was dismissing Mrs. Mallory in too cavalier a fashion. She was the sort of woman at whom men look twice, and then continue to look while she appears magnificently unaware of it.

Her hair was not red, but of a lustrous bronze, amazingly abundant, and dressed in waves with the careful skill of a coiffeur. Slightest shades of meaning she could convey with a lift of the eyebrow or an intonation of the musical voice. If she was already fencing with the encroaching years there was little evidence of it in her opulent good looks.

The whistle of the Hannah blew for the Tatlah Cache landing while Strong and Elliot were talking. The gangplank was thrown out.

A man came to the end of the wharf carrying a suitcase. He was well-set, thick in the chest and broad-shouldered. Looking down from above, Gordon Elliot guessed him to be in the early thirties.

Mrs. Mallory was the first to recognize him, which she did with a drawing little shout of welcome. "Oh, you, Mr. Man. I knew you first. I speak for you," she cried.

The man on the gangplank looked up, smiled and lifted to her his broad gray hat in a wave of greeting.

"How do you do, Mrs. Mallory? Glad to see you."

The miners from Frozen Gulch were grouped together on the lower deck. At sight of the man with the suitcase a sullen murmur rose among them. Those in the rear pushed forward and closed the lane leading to the cabins.

One of the miners was flung roughly against the new passenger. With a wide, powerful sweep of his arm the man who had just come aboard hurled the miner back among his companions.

"Gangway!" he said brusquely, and as he strode forward did not even glance in the direction of the angry men pressing toward him.

With a wave of his hand Strong pointed to a group of miners who had boarded the boat with them at Pierre's Portage. There were about a dozen of the men, for the most part husky, heavy-set foreigners. Elliot gathered from their talk that they had lost their jobs because they had tried to organize an incipient strike in the Frozen Gulch district.

"Roughnecks and booze fighters—that's all they are. But they earn their way. Not that I blame Macdonald for firing them, mind you," continued the miner. "His superintendent up there was too soft. These here Swedes got gay. Mac hit the trail for Frozen Gulch. He hammered his big fist into the bread basket of the ring-leader and said, 'Git!' That fellow's running yet, I'll bet. Then Mac called the men together and read the riot act to them. He fired this bunch on the boat and was out of the camp before you could bat an eye. It was the cleanest hurry-up job I ever did see."

"From what I've heard about him, he must be a remarkable man."

"He's the biggest man in Alaska, bar none."

This was a subject that interested Gordon Elliot very much. Colby Macdonald and his activities had brought him to the country.

"Do you mean personally—or because he represents the big corporations?"

"Both. His word comes pretty near being law up here, not only because he stands for the Consolidated, but because he's one man from the ground up."

"Do you mean that he's square—honest?"

"You've said two things, my friend," answered Strong dryly. "He's square. If he tells you anything, don't worry because he ain't put down his John Hancock before a notary. Don't waste any time looking for fat or yellow streaks in Mac. They ain't there. Nobody ever heard him squeal yet and what's more nobody ever will."

"No wonder men like him."

"But when you say honest—No! Not the way you define honesty down in the States. He's a grabber, Mac is."

"What does he look like?"

"Oh, I don't know," Strong hesitated, while he searched for words to show the picture in his mind. "Big as a house—steps out like a buck in the spring—blue-gray eyes that bore right through you."

"How old?"

"Search me. You never think of age when you're looking at him. Forty-five, maybe—or fifty—I don't know."

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lows. None of that rough stuff goes," ordered the mate sharply.

The big Cornishman who had been tossed aside crouched for a spring. He launched himself forward with the awkward force of a bear. The suitcase described a whirling arc of a circle with the arm of its owner as a radius. The bag and the head of the miner came into swift impact. Like a bullock which had been poleaxed, the man went to the floor. He turned over with a groan and lay still.

The new passenger looked across the huge, sprawling body at the group of miners facing him. They glared in savage hate. All they needed was a leader to send them driving at him with the force of an avalanche. The man at whom they raged did not give an inch. He leaned forward slightly, his weight resting on the balls of his feet, alert to the finger tips.

"Next," he taunted.

Then the mate got busy. He hustled his stevedores forward in front of the miners and shook his fist in their faces as he stormed up and down. If they wanted trouble, by Jove! It was waiting for 'em, he swore in apoplectic fury. The Hannah was a river boat and not a dive of wharf rats!

The man with the suitcase did not wait to hear out his trade. He followed the pursuer to his stateroom, dropped his baggage beside the berth, and joined the Kuslak group on the upper deck.

They greeted him eagerly, a little effusively, as if they were anxious to prove themselves on good terms with him.

"What was the matter?" asked Selfridge. "How did the trouble start?"

The big man shrugged his shoulders. "It didn't start. Some of the outfit thought they were looking for a row, but they balked on the job when Trelawney got his."

Gordon, as he watched from a little distance, corrected earlier impressions. This man had passed the thirties. He had the thick neck and solid trunk of middle life, but he carried himself so superbly that his whole bearing defied that years could touch his splendid physique.

Strong had stepped to the wharf to talk with an old acquaintance but when the boat threw out a warning signal he made a hurried grab and came on board. He rejoined Elliot.

"Well, what d'you think of him? Was I right?"

The young man had already guessed who this imperious stranger was. "I never saw anybody get away with a hard job as easily as he did that one. You could see with half an eye that those fellows meant fight. They were all primed for it—and he bluffed them out."

"Bluffed them—huh! I was where I could see just what happened. Colby Macdonald wasn't even looking at Trelawney, but you bet he saw him start. That suitcase traveled like a streak of light."

Like a bullock which had been poleaxed, the man went to the floor.

light. You'd 'a' thought it weighed about two pounds. That ain't all, either. Mac used his brains. Guess what was in that grip."

"The usual thing, I suppose."

"You've got another guess—packed in among his socks and underwear was about twenty pounds of ore samples. The pursuer told me. It was that quartz that put Trelawney to sleep so thorough that he'd just begun to wake up when I passed a minute ago."

The young man turned his eyes again upon the big Canadian Scotsman. He was talking with Mrs. Mallory, who was leaning back luxuriously in a steamer chair she had brought aboard at St. Michael's. It would have been hard to conceive a contrast greater than the one between this pampered heiress of the ages and the modern business berserk who looked down into her mocking eyes.

He was the embodiment of the dominant male—efficient to the last inch of his straight six feet. What he wanted

he had always taken, by the sheer strength that was in him. Back of her smiling insolence lay a silken force to match his own. She too had taken what she wanted from life, but she had won it by indirection. Manifestly she was of those women who conceive that charm and beauty are tools to bend men to their wills.

The dusky young woman with the magazine was the first of those on the upper deck to retire for the night. She flitted so quietly that Gordon did not notice until she had gone. Mrs. Selfridge and her friends disappeared with their men folk, calling gay good nights to one another as they left.

Macdonald and Mrs. Mallory talked. After a time she too vanished.

The big promoter leaned against the deck rail, where he was joined by Selfridge. For a long time they talked in low voices. The little man had most to say. His chief listened, but occasionally interrupted to ask a sharp, incisive question.

Elliot, sitting farther forward with Strong, judged that Selfridge was making a report of his trip. Once he caught a fragment of their talk, enough to confirm this impression.

"Did Winton tell you that himself?" demanded the Scotsman.

The answer of his employee came in a murmur so low that the words were lost. But the name used told Gordon a good deal. The commissioner of the general land office at Washington signed his letters Harold B. Winton.

Strong tossed the stub of his cigarette overboard and nodded good night. A glance at his watch told Elliot that it was past two o'clock. He rose, stretched and sauntered back to his stateroom.

The young man had just taken off his coat when there came the hurried rush of trampling feet upon the hurricane deck above. Almost instantly he heard a cry of alarm. He could hear the shuffling of footsteps and the sound of heavy bodies moving.

Someone lifted a frightened shout. "Help! Help!" The call had come, he thought, from Selfridge.

Gordon flung open the door of his room, raced along the deck and took the stairs three at a time. A huddle of men swayed and shifted heavily in front of him.

Even as he ran toward the mass, Elliot noticed that the only sounds were grunts, stertorous breathings, and the scraping of feet. The attackers wanted no publicity. The attacked was too busy to waste breath in futile cries. He was fighting for his life.

Two men, separated from the crowd, lay on the deck farther aft. One was on top of the other, his fingers clutching the gullet of his helpless opponent. The agony of the man underneath found expression only in the drumming heels that beat a tattoo on the floor.

The spasmodic feet were shod in Oxford fashions of an ultra-fashionable cut. No doubt the owner of the smart footwear had been pulled down as he was escaping to shout the alarm.

The runner hurdled the two in his stride and plunged straight at the struggling tangle. He caught one man by the shoulders from behind and flung him back. He struck hard, smashing blows as he fought his way to the heart of the melee. Heavy-fisted miners with corded muscles landed upon his face and head and neck. He did not care a straw for the odds.

The sudden attack of Elliot had opened the pack. The man battling against a dozen was Colby Macdonald. The very number of his foes had saved him so far from being rushed overboard or trampled down. His coat and shirt were in rags. He was bruised and battered and bleeding from the chest up. But he was still slugging hard.

They had him pressed to the rail. A huge miner, head down, had his arms around the waist of the Scotsman and was trying to throw him overboard. Macdonald lashed out and landed flush upon the cheek of a man attempting to brain him with a billet of wood. He hammered home a short-arm jolt against the ear of the giant who was giving him the bear grip.

The big miner grunted, but hung on like a football tackler. With a jerk he raised Macdonald from the floor just as three or four others rushed him again. The rail gave way, splintered like kindling wood. The Scotsman and the man at grips with him went over the side together.

Clear and loud rang the voice of Elliot. "Man overboard!"

The wheelsman signaled to the engine room to reverse and blew short, sharp shrieks of warning.

"Men overboard—two of 'em!" explained Elliot in a shout from the boat which he was trying to lower.

The first mate and another man ran to help him. The three of them lowered and manned the boat. Gordon sat in the bow and gave directions while the other two put their backs into the stroke.

Across the water came a call for help. "I'm sinking—burry!"

The other man in the river was a dozen yards from the one in distress. With strong, swift, overhand strokes he shot through the water.

"All right," he called presently. "I've got him."

The oarsmen drew alongside the

swimmer. With one hand Macdonald caught hold of the edge of the boat. The other clutched the rescued man by the hair of his head.

"Look out. You're drowning him," the mate warned.

"Am I?" Macdonald glanced with mild interest at the head that had been until that moment submerged. "Shows how absent-minded a man gets. I was thinking about how he tried to drown me, I expect."

They dragged the miner aboard. "Go ahead. I'll swim down," Macdonald ordered.

"Better come aboard," advised the mate.

"No. I'm all right."

The Scotsman pushed himself back from the boat and fell into an easy stroke. Nevertheless, there was power in it, for he reached the Hannah before the rescued miner had been helped to the deck.

A dozen passengers, crowded on the lower deck, pushed forward eagerly to see. Among them was Selfridge, his shirt and collar torn loose at the neck and his immaculate checked suit dusty and disheveled. He was wearing a pair of up to date Oxford pumps.

Macdonald shook himself like a Newfoundland dog. He looked around with sardonic amusement, a grin on his swollen and disfigured face.

"Quite a pleasant welcome home," he said ironically, his cold eyes fixed on a face that looked as if it might have been kicked by a healthy mule. "Eh, Trelawney?"

The Cornishman glared at him, and turned away with a low, savage oath.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Macdonald?" asked the captain.

"Hurt! Not at all, captain. I cut myself while I was shaving this morning—just a scratch," was the ironic answer.

"There's been some dirty work going on. I'll see the men are punished, sir."

"Forget it, captain. I'll attend to that little matter." His jaunty, almost insolent glance made the half-circle again. "Sorry you were too late for the party, gentlemen—most of you. I see three or four of you who were 'among those present.' It was a strictly exclusive affair. And now, if you don't mind, I'll say good night."

He turned on his heel, went up the stairway to the deck above and disappeared into his stateroom.

## CHAPTER II.

## The Girl From Drogheda.

Gordon Elliot was too much of a night owl to be an early riser, but next morning he was awakened by the tramp of hurried feet along the deck to the accompaniment of brusque orders, together with frequent angry puffing and snorting of the boat.

From the quiver of the walls he guessed that the Hannah was stuck on a sandbar. The mate's language gave backing to his surmise.

Elliot tried to settle back to sleep, but after two or three ineffectual efforts gave it up. He rose and did one or two setting-up exercises to limber his joints. The first of these flashed the signal to his brain that he was stiff and sore. This brought to mind the fight on the hurricane deck, and he smiled. It hurt every time he twined a muscle.

The young man stepped to the looking glass. Both eyes were blacked, his lip had been cut, and there was a purple weal well up on his left cheek. He stopped himself from grinning only just in time to save another twinge of pain.

"Some party while it lasted. I never saw more willing mixers. Everybody seemed anxious to sit in except Mr. Wally Selfridge," he explained to his reflection. "But Macdonald is the class. He's there with both right and left. That upstart of his is vicious. Don't ever get in the way of it, Gordon Elliot."

He bathed, dressed and went on deck.

Early though he was, one passenger at least was up before him. The young woman he had noticed last evening with the magazine was doing a constitutional.

Irish he guessed her when the deep blue eyes rested on his for an instant as she passed, and fortified his conjecture by the coloring of the clear-skinned face and the marks of the Celtic race delicately stamped upon it.

The pursuer came out of his room and joined Elliot. He smiled at sight of the young man's face. "Your map's a little out of plumb this morning, sir," he ventured.

"But you ought to see the other fellow," came back Gordon boyishly.

"I've seen him—several of him. I've got to give it to you and Mr. Macdonald. You know how to hit."

"Oh, I'm not in his class."

Gordon Elliot meant what he said. He was himself an athlete, had played for three years left tackle on his college eleven. More than one critic had picked him for the All-America team. But after all he was a product of training and of the gymnasiums. Macdonald was what nature and a long line of fighting Highland ancestors had made him.

The pursuer chuckled. "He's a good un, Mac is. They say he liked to have

drowned Northrup after he had saved him."

Elliot was again following with his eyes the lit of the girl's movements. Apparently he had not heard what the officer said.

With a grin the pursuer opened another attack. "Don't blame you a bit, Mr. Elliot. She's the prettiest colleen that ever sailed from Dublin bay."

"Who is she?"

"The name on the books is Sheba O'Neill."

"From Dublin, you say?"

"Oh, if you want to be literal, her baggage says Drogheda. Ireland is Ireland to me."

"Where is she bound for?"

"Kuslak."

The young woman passed them with a little nod of morning greeting to the

pursuer. Fine and dainty though she was, Miss O'Neill gave an impression of radiant strength.

"What is she going to do in Kuslak?" Again the pursuer grinned. "What do they all do—the good-looking ones?"

"Get married, you mean?"

"Surest thing you know. Girls coming up ask me what to bring by way of outfit. I used to make out a long list. Now I tell them to bring clothes enough for six weeks and their favorite wedding march."

"Is this girl engaged?"

"Can't prove it by me," said the officer lightly. "But she'll never get out of Alaska a spinster—not that girl. She may be going in to teach, or to run a millinery store, or to keep books for a trading company. She'll stay to bring up kiddies of her own. They all do."

Three children came up the stairway, caught sight of Miss O'Neill, and raced pell-mell across the deck to her.

The young woman's face was transformed. It was bubbling with tenderness, with gay and happy laughter. Flinging her arms wide, she waited for them. With incoherent cries of delight, they flung themselves upon her.

The two oldest were girls. The youngest was a fat, cuddly little boy with dimples in his soft cheeks.

"I dived myself, Aunt Sheba. Didn't I, Gwen?"

Sheba stooped and held him off to admire. "All by yourself—just think of that."

"We helped just the teeniest bit on the buttons," confessed Janet, the oldest of the small family.

"And I tied his shoes," added Gwen-dolen, "after he had laced them."

Gwendolen snuggled close to Miss O'Neill. "You always smell so sweet and clean and violet, Aunt Sheba," she whispered in confidence.

"You're spoiling me, Gwen," laughed the young woman. "You've kissed the blarney stone. It's a good thing you're leaving the boat today."

Miss Gwen had one more confidence to make in the ear of her friend. "I wish you'd come too and be our new mamma," she begged.

A shell-pink tinge crept into the milky skin of the Irish girl. She was less sure of herself, more easily embarrassed, than the average American of her age and sex.

"Are your things gathered ready for packing, Janet?" she asked quietly.

Elliot obtains an introduction to Miss O'Neill and while the boat is taking on freight they go for a stroll and have an amazing adventure together.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Caste in Khaki. Mayne (as two officers pass without a glance)—Gee, Gert, some army men are 'ntirely blind to the female sex. Gert—Sure. I guess they must be long to that reserve corps—Judge.

Quid Pro Quo. "Here's a theorist declares hens think like human beings." "I don't doubt they think like the human beings who cackle like hens."